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ABSTRACT

There are many different approaches to educational research. They include the efforts of those who hope to make contributions to educational knowledge and theory through researching their own educational practices as teachers and researchers. In communicating an educational epistemology of practice, it is intended that the document show a dialogical form of representation for an educational inquiry into improvement of learning, and a dialectical approach to explicating and using educational standards of judgment for testing a claim to educational knowledge. The experiences of one author in teaching a class of year-nine female students in England are the basis of this exploration, illustrated by extracts from the work of two students. The process being engaged is summarized as: (1) identifying a concern; (2) imagining a solution; (3) acting on the proposed solution; (4) observing the effects of what is being done; and (5) evaluating and modifying the actions. (Contains 29 references.) (Author/SLD)

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AN EDUCATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY OF PRACTICE

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SUMMARY

There are many different approaches to educational research. There are educational researchers who see themselves as social scientists using the methods of social science in educational contexts. There are philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, historians and management theorists all contributing to journals of educational research. There are others like ourselves who, through researching their own educational practices as teachers and researchers, hope to make contributions to educational knowledge and educational theory.

When educational researchers make a claim to know something about their subject, education, they are making a claim to educational knowledge. Those educational researchers who, like ourselves, still believe in the importance of testing the validity of a claim to knowledge, do need to know the unit of appraisal and the standards of judgement which can be used to test the validity of such a claim.

In communicating an educational epistemology of practice we intend to show a dialogical form of representation for an educational enquiry of the kind, 'How can I help you to improve your learning?, and a dialectical approach to explicating and using educational standards of judgement for testing a claim to educational knowledge.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Moira will be introducing herself later in her educative relationships with her pupils. I am Jack Whitehead, writing in my professional capacity as a Lecturer in Education at the University of Bath, in England. I have worked here since 1973 with education students. My research has been focused on reconstructing educational theory so that it can produce valid descriptions and explanations for the educational development of individual learners. My interest in an educational epistemology of practice began in 1971 when I rejected the view that educational theory was constituted by the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. My rejection was based on the insight that as a teacher researcher, reflecting upon the nature of my own educational relationships with my pupils, I needed a form of educational theory which was grounded in educational practice and I needed an educational epistemology which could clarify that standards of judgement to test the validity of the explanations which formed the theory.

In revealing such an epistemology in this paper I need to show you a claim to know my educational practice in an educational enquiry of the form, 'How do I help you to improve your learning?'. What I have in mind is an educative relationship in which I am tutoring Moira Laidlaw, a teacher researcher, in her Ph.D. enquiry into the nature of her educative relationships with her pupils. In this relationship I claim that Moira is influencing my educational enquiry into the nature of an educational epistemology of practice and I claim to be having an educative influence in Moira's enquiry into how she can help her pupils to improve the quality of their learning.

Like all educational enquiries ours takes place through time. We begin below with a conversation on the 9th March, 1995, and I move on to the here and now of this writing on the 22nd March, 1995, before presenting Moira's account of her educative relations with her pupils as they are revealed in the action planning and interactive journals with her pupils of March 20th, 1995. There are further conversations and reflections on March 23rd, 28th and 30th. Moira's account contains no academic references other than to an action reflection cycle from my own work, to Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' which is the curriculum text, and to the standard assessment tests (SATS) which the British Government has imposed in England and Wales. The lack of academic references is not because she does not have the understanding of wide reading (see Laidlaw, 1994, 1995). It is because they are not necessary to her educational enquiry, 'How do I help you to improve your learning?', in the context of her classroom. This point has significance in that a teacher researcher is revealing a form of educational knowledge which is grounded in her educational practice rather than grounded within any other form of theorising.

The academic references became necessary for my enquiry as Moira helped me to understand the nature of an educational epistemology of her practice. My understanding of epistemology has been influenced by a decision which is a characteristic of personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958). That is, to understand the world from my own point of view, as an individual claiming originality and exercising my judgement with universal intent. Moira has moved my learning forward by showing me the significance of her woman's way of knowing in her connected or relational knowing. She has helped me to extend the range of my questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' to embrace the other in questions of the kind, 'How do I help you to improve your learning?'. Ben Cunningham (1994) has also been influential in this learning as I have come to appreciate the significance of his question of the form, 'How do I understand you?'.

I wish to make a distinction at this point between social science theory and educational theory. Like Lomax (1994) I believe educational research is a practical rather than a social science. I know many educational action researchers characterise themselves as critical social theorists and draw their assumptions from Habermas' theory of communicative action. I have found his four principles of validity (Habermas, 1976) in relation to comprehensibility, propositional claims, normative background and authenticity, useful in testing the validity of my own claims to educational knowledge (Whitehead, 1993). His awesome critique of functionalist reason however, did not provide me with a base for my educational epistemology of practice. It provided me with additional grounds for my focus on learning (Whitehead, 1976) when he said, in relation to theory, that, in his abstracting the development of cognitive structures from the historical

dynamic of events and in his abstracting the evolution of society from the historical concretion of forms of life:

A theory developed in this way can no longer start by examining concrete ideals immanent in traditional forms of life. It must orient itself to the range of learning processes that is opened up at a given time by a historically attained level of learning. It must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life-contexts and epochs as a whole. (Habermas 1989, p.383).

Where I think the analysis offered by Moira below has a different, educational base, to the critical social science base of Habermas, is because it is grounded in her educative relationships with her pupils, and the question, 'How can I help you to improve your learning?'. We both believe that we have revealed an educational epistemology of practice and urge you to contribute to our educational development through your critical evaluation of our claim to educational knowledge.

The knowledge we have in mind has a dialogical form in which individuals are helping each other to take their enquiries forward. It is dialectical in the sense of a 'coming to understand' through a process of question and answer and the recognition that we exist as living contradictions (Ilyenkov, 1977) in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'. By a 'living contradiction' we mean that our 'I's, in questions of this form, embody together both the values we are trying to realise in our practice, and our experience of their lack, omission or negation.

Those interested in the rigour of our claim may wish to analyse it in relation to Winter's (1989) six criteria of dialectical and reflexive critique, risk, plural structure, multiple resource, and theory practice transformation. In our concern to share an educational epistemology we wish to focus on the unit of appraisal and the standards of judgement which can be used to test the validity of our claim rather than on the concept of rigour. Our unit of appraisal is the individual's claim to know their own educational practice. Our standards of judgement are those values whose meanings are clarified in the course of their emergence in practice and which both give meaning and purpose to the enquirer's existence and constitute the enquiry as 'educational'. Whilst we can begin to communicate the meanings of our values in the form of the linguistic list below, we ask you to recognise that this list does not carry the most significant meanings. We think that the significant meanings are those which we reveal, through time, in our practice as we answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?', and 'How can I help you to improve your learning?'. Jack will be offering his interpretation of these values below and Moira will show the meaning of her values in her practice.

The value-words which carry some of our meanings are;

i) Ontological authenticity - Can you see, through time and practice that we are committed to living the values and understandings we claim to hold?
ii) Spiritual quality - Can you identify the quality of our I-You relationships (Buber, 1923) which are life affirming and which embody an individual integrity which does not violate the integrity of the other?
iii) Ethical commitment - can you feel the tension which moves our enquiries forward as we experience ourselves not living our values as fully as we believe it is possible to live them?
iv) Aesthetics of existence - do you experience our representations of our attempts to give a form to our own lives in our productive work in education as aesthetically pleasing in the sense that they are both appropriate and beautiful?
v) Educative conversations - have we expressed our dialogical capacities to help each other to learn something of significance about ourselves and our worlds?
v) Educational epistemology of practice - have we shown you an educational epistemology of practice in defining our unit of appraisal, explicating our standards of judgement and showing the dialectical logic of our educational enquiries?
vi) Educational theory - have we shown a way of reconstituting educational theory in the descriptions and explanations which we, as individual learners, are producing for our own

educational development as we answer questions of the kind, 'how do I improve my practice?' and 'How can I help you to improve your learning?'.

vii) Educative relationships - have we shown a way of representing a claim to know our our educative relationships in a way which includes our students speaking for themselves and showing the values which constitute their learning as 'educational'?

viii) Educational development - have we shown an extension in our cognitive range and concern (Peters, 1966) in our learning how to live our values more fully in our practice?

ix) Cultural renewal - have we related our living educational theories to a process of cultural renewal in the sense that our theories are making a contribution to an aesthetic form of description, explanation, communication and representation which can add to our society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought (Said, 1993)?

x) A good social order - have we related our living educational theories to a form of good social order within which we both recognise and contribute to the influence of the economic well-being and security of ourselves and others, within a democratic form of social organisation (Hutton, 1995)?

In inviting your responses to these questions we are expecting to be shown that we have yet to reach perfection! We are sure that we are not living some of our values as fully as we could do and that you can help us to a fuller recognition of where we might make improvements in our educational enquiries. We expect this recognition will contribute to a creative tension in us as we experience ourselves as living contradictions and help us to move our enquiries forward. We intend to hold ourselves accountable to your responses at an International Conference of Teacher Researchers in England in the Summer of 1996 organised by Tom Russell of Queens University, Kingston, Ontario.

We are hoping that the paper will be seen by teachers and teacher educators as a useful contribution to their enquiries of the form, 'How can I help you to improve your learning?'. In particular we are hoping that the paper carries forward the points made by Jack at AERA '94, as a discussant in the Interactive Symposium on Teaching Action: Studies of Teaching and Academic Experience in Schools of Education. In commenting on papers by Mary-Lynn Hamilton (1994), Peg Placier (1994), Stefinnee Pinnegar (1994), Tom Russell (1994), and Karen Guilfoyle (1994), Jack wondered whether their enquiries could be moved forward by a concern to include some evidence that they had influenced the learning and educational development of their students. We hope that the focus in this present paper on an educational epistemology of practice - which includes evidence from the learning of a teacher educator, and a teacher and her pupils - will be useful to teacher reseachers and teacher educator researchers who wish to represent and understand their educational practices in a way which includes their educative relationships with their pupils and students. We are particularly concerned that this paper should be seen to complement the work of five other researchers. The first is Jean McNiff (1992, 1993) and her work into the generative capacities of individuals as she extends action research programmes for teacher researchers (McNiff & Collins, 1994) associated with the Marino Institute of Higher Education in Dublin, Ireland. The second is Kevin Eames (1993) and his research into dialectical forms of educational knowledge. The third is Pam Lomax (1994) and her research into the forms of representation of educational enquiries and the standards of judgement which can be used to test educational action research accounts. The fourth is Moyra Evans (1995) and her action research into her work as a school deputy headteacher with responsibility for staff development and the fifth is Tony Ghaye (1993) and his research into critical conversations. Here is part of our conversation of March 9th 1995.

March 9th. 1995

Jack. *How can I help you to improve your learning? What is your concern?*

Moira. *My concern is how I can improve the quality of learning with my pupils - particularly the spiritual aspects of my teaching.*

J. If we take this idea of the spiritual aspect of your teaching could you say why you think this is significant?

M.I think spiritual qualities are what enable me to be life-affirming with my pupils. I'm not just teaching English. The subtext for me is to enable the girls to lead happier, more productive lives. Lives which are enriched by the learning environment which I am able to provide for them. At the centre of this enrichment are the spiritual qualities which enable me to be life-affirming.

J.Could you help us to understand what you mean by spiritual development by focusing on the living relationships you have been experiencing with your pupils today? Could you focus on how you are actually trying to answer the question how could we judge the quality of your pupils' spiritual development?

M. I am thinking of my Year Nine group. I am using several related processes I have never combined in this way before. I have encouraged them to develop detailed action plans in which they engage with a critical friend. They are isolating their own concerns and developing their own ways of improving their work. They are also becoming accountable to the group. They are producing interactive journals and are writing freely about the literature they are reading outside lessons. They are expressing something of their understanding first of all what they are doing in English but also about who they are and what they want. They are using the journals to ask questions of themselves, me and the text. They are expressing their opinions and ideas which actually go outside the English context. My intuition is that this process is improving both their commitment to what we are doing in English, but also is making them enjoy what they are doing a great deal more. Enjoyment for me is such an important aspect of human existence ...

J. And how do you think you might share that in terms of a form of public accountability where meanings would be able to be communicated? If you are talking about spiritual qualities, values which are life affirming, how do you think we might represent that or offer it in a way that could be publicly tested?

M. Within the girls' action plans I have also done my own very detailed action plan. I gave it to them yesterday as a way of expressing my own public accountability. I have expressed (to them) particular concerns about how I can enhance their enjoyment. One of the ways in which I wish to be judged is whether they are voluntarily articulating enjoyment, whether they are going away and reading books I neither suggested nor recommended and whether they are coming back to me in their journals to discuss some of the things they are thinking about. I am hoping to show by example that there are certain things that are worth affirming. I also want to write a rigorous paper to be judged by my peers. The feeling I am getting as I am teaching these girls is that something very educational is happening. There is an expression of enthusiasm coming from what I would call the spiritual and therefore I would like to understand exactly what is going on in those areas so that I can enhance my own practice.

March 22nd. 1995

Jack - Moira gave me the following paper this morning. I think it is a claim to know something of her educational practices with her pupils and reveals some of the standards of judgement which can be used to test the validity of her claim to know her own educational practice. I am thinking of those standards of judgement we drew your attention to in our value-words above, whose meanings are not carried in a purely conceptual form but whose meanings are clarified in the course of their emergence in practice. The standards are values in the sense that they are those human goals which Moira embodies and which both give her life meaning and purpose in her vocation of education and constitute her enquiry as 'educational'. I think you will also see my influence on her educational development as she integrates three of my ideas on:

a) existing as a living contradiction in questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'

b) using an action reflection cycle in a systematic form of educational enquiry into questions of the kind, 'how can I help you to improve your learning?'

c) constituting her living educational theory as a description and explanation of her educational practice.

In my direct communiction with Moira below I am exploring the possibility that she might find a fourth idea of use, in her educational enquiry, as I ask her to consider the possibility that by acknowledging the significance of political and economic relationships in her practice, she will enhance her understanding of her contribution to cultural renewal.

Through her text below, I feel Moira brings a quality of care into her relationships within which, for me, the unity of humanity appears to be possible. For those readers familiar with the quality of Martin Buber's I-You relation you may relate, as I do, through her I-You relations to the ontological authenticity in Moira's claim to know her educative relationships with her pupils. However I think that Moira is omitting any reference to some significant political and economic relationships which are important to her contribution to cultural renewal. Let me now speak directly to Moira.

Dear Moira -

In communicating the nature of this spiritual relationship, within the linguistic form below, I think you are expressing an aesthetic of your existence as an educator. I am meaning this in the sense that you show in your teaching of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', a work of poetic inspiration, that you value both your pupils' capacities to bring love, beauty and goodness into the world and their capacities to learn how to do so. In your learning and the learning of your pupils you show that you are engaged in a systematic form of enquiry through your use of an action/reflection cycle. You also demonstrate the logic of the art of a dialectician in holding both your one and your pupils' many enquiries together.

Through your reflexive critique of your own practice in the account below, I experience you explicating the standards of judgement which you use to test the validity of your claim to know your own educational practice. You present evidence to substantiate your claim and explicate the values you embody in your practice which constitute it as 'educational'. Your readers must judge for themselves whether they feel your ontological authenticity in your claim to know your own educational practice. You know I value highly your ontological authenticity in the integrity you show in living your values in your practice.

It seems to me that the educational knowledge being generated in your reflective practice has the potential to extend the knowledge-base of the Academy. This does of course, as Lomax (1994) has argued, depend upon researchers such as you and I enhancing our understanding of the politics of educational knowledge in the sense of finding ways of legitimating such claims to knowledge and their standards of judgement within the Academy.

I think there is something missing from your account which is related to the political and economic context in which it is being produced. We both know the tension you have experienced as government policy influences the amount of money available to schools to spend on teachers and how easily a decision could be made to terminate your contract and end your educative relationships with these pupils. By not refering to these economic and political relationships I feel you miss the opportunity to explain what capacities you have drawn on to help you transcend these constraints and make your contribution to the renewal of our culture through living your values in your educative relationships with your pupils.

Best Wishes, Jack.

As a University Academic I want my work to contribute to the development of educational research methodology and I think its contribution can be located in relation to Denzin's and Lincoln's (1994) views on Qualitative Research, where they define the present phase of such research in terms of crises in representation and legitimation with action orientated enquiries just on the horizon. In offering a dialectical approach to the explication and use of values as standards of judgement in testing the validity of claims to educational knowledge I am trying to

make a contribution to such enquiries. What I mean by a dialectical methodology concerns a view of 'immanence' in which the meaning of values and understandings emerge over time through practice. Consider for example the emergence of an understanding of the significance of economic and political relationships in an educational enquiry. In my account of my educational development (Whitehead, 1993) I show how an understanding of these relationships has been integrated in my educational development. This integration only occured after several rather painful experiences of standing firm in the face of pressures to terminate my employment, to deny my originality and to prevent me questioning the truth of power of those in authority. Moira has resisted the integration of such understandings for several years. Two weeks ago she was informed by the School that it was likely that because of financial cuts to school budgets her contract, along with other part-time contracts, would be terminated next month. In my direct communication with Moira above I continue to encourage her to integrate some understanding of these political and economic relationships into the story of her educational practice.

I also want my work to contribute to a process of cultural renewal in the sense of supporting the creation of forms of educational knowledge which have the aesthetic power to captivate your imaginations and act as educative influences for good. I am meaning this in the sense of helping or encouraging you to bring life-affirming values more fully into the world.

I think that there are many good teachers in our schools who embody the educational knowledge which could revitalise our culture. However, this knowledge is not being explicated in the aesthetic form necessary to captivate the imaginations of many citizens and influence their practical actions in contributing to improvements in our social order. For me there is nothing more beautiful than to see a teacher enabling a pupil to give a form to their life which they value and see as extending their understanding and as contributing to the well-being of another. I believe such educative relationships have the spiritual commitments of I-You relationships whilst requiring works of poetic inspiration to communicate their meanings to others. I want to see the educational knowledge embodied in such educative relationships legitimated with as high a value as possible within the Academy and Society. Whilst my present work falls short of such high ideals I think I might get closer to their realisation through your committed response. Here is one such response.

Action planning and interactive journals with a Year Nine English group

by Moira Laidlaw, Oldfield Girls' School,
Kelston Road, Bath, Avon.
20 March 1995

Prologue:

'I have spent the evening marking the Year Nine essays. What a joy! I'm so lucky to be working with these girls. They inspire me. They keep reminding me how worthwhile it all is - Life, the Universe and Everything..The essays, some of them, made me cry with delight. The effort, the desire to articulate well, the sense of empowerment, the sensitivity, the stirrings of originality, the creativity and empathy. I found almost all of them in most essays. In three I found all of them. The improvements are being revealed not only in their Levels in the National Curriculum - as in my criteria for success in my Action Plan, but also in their growing confidence, their citing of other Literature, their cogent points of view, their greatly improved spelling, punctuation and use of Language...' 17.3.95. (Private correspondence.)

Introduction:

In this article I would like to outline some of the work I have been doing with a particular group of Year Nine girls (they are 13-14 years old). This work consists of, in particular, an action planning process and writing in interactive journals, which started at the beginning of February and is continuing at the time of writing.

For the first ten years of my professional life I worked as a teacher of English and German in a mixed comprehensive school in Shropshire. I loved it. I was then redeployed due to falling rolls and decided to do an M.Ed. here at Bath. After six years of working in teacher-education and nearly completing a Ph.D., in September 1994, I went back into the classroom as a teacher of English at a local girls' Grant Maintained Comprehensive School. I am on my fourth fixed-term contract there, replacing a member of staff who is absent due to illness. At the time of writing this I do not know whether my contract will be renewed after Easter.

In my Ph.D. I have looked at ways of improving the quality of learning with my education students and, more recently, my pupils at Oldfield. In order to do this I have used the action planning process within the action research cycle (Whitehead, 1985). In this process I pursue the following process:

a) I have a concern. In other words there is something I wish to improve in my teaching;
b) I imagine a solution;
c) I act in ways suggested by the solution;
d) I observe the effects of what I'm doing;
e) I evaluate and then modify what I'm doing.

a) I have a concern

In returning to the classroom, there were many things to concern me: I had never taught under the National Curriculum although I had taught **about** it in my PGCE work at the University. This meant that I had never had to make a decision about the level of a child's work. I had never taught for the SATS, to whose introduction I had, like so many English teachers across the country, been opposed. I had never taught anything but mixed ability either. In addition I had never taught classes consisting entirely of girls. Out of all these potential disadvantages I wanted to choose a concern which would enable me to help the girls make the maximum number of improvements possible in their learning about English.

When I was asked to take the 'fast' group in Year Nine after Christmas I saw it as a challenge. Ideologically I am in favour of mixed ability teaching in English. I'd done it for ten years and

really enjoyed it: I had seen pupils learning the values of co-operation and empathy with this system. Admittedly, I had also worried about my abilities to differentiate in ways which enhanced learning for all individuals. However, the English faculty was trying out the idea of setting children according to ability at this stage for the first time.

So this was the situation: a class of 32 girls, the text 'Romeo and Juliet' and the darling SATS of May looming! I had to think fast about how I could manage to enhance the learning of this setted group of girls in ways which did not simply feed them into the system as if they were parts on a conveyor belt. The work I had done in my previous school, and then the research nearly completed for my Ph.D., convinced me that treating people as individuals is a key way to enhance learning and self-esteem, two criteria by which I judge the quality of the work I am doing as an educator.

I imagine a solution: my own action plan

Early in the Spring term I wrote an action plan which I would later show the girls. The concern I had was this:

How can I help to improve the quality of learning in English with my Year Nine group?

I highlighted the areas of spelling, punctuation, expression (written and oral) confidence with difficult texts, enjoyment, commitment, wide reading. I gave the reasons cited above (mostly to do with my lack of experience in this context) as the justification for my concern. I then continued:

What can I do to enable these improvements?:

Praise good work always; inaugurate action plans ... to encourage accountability for improvement and responsibility for own learning; mark carefully and promptly towards educational purposes (above); encourage wide reading; monitor and evaluate responses individually to variety of texts; use variety of resources - books, video, tapes, role-play, recitation etc.; start interactive journals about English lessons, their learning and my own teaching; develop a systematic and enquiring approach to texts orally and in writing; encourage constructively critical feedback, about their own performance from themselves, critical friend and from me; encourage an ethos of pride in excellence: highlight good educational processes and encourage high quality outcomes.

How will I know that I have been successful in these aims?

A.T. Levels will rise for individuals in written and oral work; pupils will be voluntarily reading good quality literature; they will be showing a commitment to learning in the subject; they will express enjoyment of the subject; they will write about their ideas and perspectives in their (voluntary) journals which they will want to share with me; they will ask questions about how they can improve their performance in English; spellings and punctuation will be freer from errors; I will continue to enjoy the lessons with them.

c) I act & observe

For the purposes of this article I will take extracts principally from Cathy's and Lucy's work, with substantiation from the action plans, essays and journal entries from others too. I have chosen Cathy's and Lucy's work in particular because they write extensively and because they were both happy for their writing to be used for this article. Lucy even wrote in her journal:

> *'17.3.95. I am very pleased to be of assistance with your work. Please do use any of my work, I am more than willing...Please could you show me what work you are using and what it's needed for, how it is of help and what your answer to it is...'*

As an introduction to the Shakespeare text I decided to read the first scene of 'King Lear' with them as it exemplifies many of Shakespeare's dramatic techniques in his tragedies. It would also be the literary equivalent of throwing them in at the deep end. I had seen enough in the first couple of lessons to be confident that they would swim. After 'King Lear', 'Romeo and Juliet' would seem more manageable. I stressed to them the importance of wide quotation, care with spelling and punctuation, use of language (avoiding slang), detailed characterisation, and the form and structure of an essay. After two weeks of intense work I collected in essays (on 20.1.95.) with the following title:

'What impression of Cordelia and Kent do you get in the opening scene, and how does Shakespeare ensure that the audience is on their side?'

After a clear introduction in which Cathy tells the reader what to expect in the essay (although she calls the plot 'the story') she continues with this:

> *...It is not made clear what is going on - but I have found it is not unusual for Shakespeare to begin in the middle of a conversation or action. For instance I noticed that the play, 'The Tempest' opens on a boat in the middle of a storm with thunder and lightning.'*

Against this comment I wrote 'excellent!'

At one point she writes:

> *'I think that Shakespeare choose to have two main characters with so similar characteristics so that he could emphasise the good choice/ option.'*

I corrected her spelling mistake and challenged the use of 'choice/option'.

She concludes her essay thus:

> *'Overal I think that Shakespeare made two of the main characters have similar characteristics so that it was obvious to the audience after a succession of events that they were standing-up against the King for 'good' and that they should rebel against the King. I think that I have proved this well in my essay.'*

Cathy is already capable of justifying a point of view. There is, however, awkwardness in her style: *'they were standing -up against the King for 'good' and that they should rebel against the King'*, although the point itself is sound. For this essay I awarded her a Level 7- as it was full of insight, mostly well expressed, with only a few careless errors. I was mentally comparing her essay to 16+ coursework which in my previous school I would have awarded a grade C-/D+. I checked my marks and reasons for them constantly with the second in the Faculty who is in charge of Keystage Three.

Spelling and expression continued to be sources of mistakes for Cathy in a context question set on 3.2.95. on the Prince's speech early in the play 'Romeo and Juliet'. Her opening is quite chaotic:

> *'Gregory and Sampson are the two Capulet servents. They are in quite a low class in socity and all they can think about is women and sex. They don't seem to care about the women's feelings at all. Then they start and other characters are added into the story soon Benvolio a man of higher class tries to split them up...'*

This passage reveals Cathy's formal weaknesses more acutely. This was written under time-pressure in class. It showed me more clearly which weaknesses needed my attention. These included syntax and expression.

On 13.2.95. I talked to the Year Nine girls about action planning as a process I had used myself and asked them to pose themselves three questions (see next paragraph). I wanted them to isolate their own concerns as my previous experience had taught me that enabling pupils to take responsibility for their own learning is a useful way of improving the process. This does not mean that I was unclear about my own agenda: the action planning process would, I hoped, encourage a mature approach to the learning process as well as helping the pupils with the content of the subject. I saw my responsibility consisting of enabling them to articulate their own learning needs within the contexts of the curriculum and the wider issues of expanding their sense of purpose in English lessons.

These are the questions I asked them to pose themselves in their action plans:

a) What do I want to improve?
b) How can I improve it?
c) Who/what can help me with it? (i.e. what resources do I need?)
d) How will I know when I have achieved my objectives?

Cathy produced these ideas for her action plan on 13.2.95. (In the quotations for the Girls work, for authenticity) I have left the spellings as they appeared in their texts)

Spelling
- reading through my work more carefully
- taking note of spellings and learning them.

Slang
- read good quality lititure.
- make a note of when I have made mistakes and avoid using them again.

Punctuation
- read through work more carefully
- make a note of any I don't know.

Write-in more detail.
- reading more good quality lititure.
- taking note of what Miss Laidlaw says and trying to include some of her 'new' words.

Read more HARD
-Read good quality English lititure.
- take advice as to which books others have enjoyed

Quoations
By reading more will hopefully give me more inspiration for quoats.

How will I know when I have reached my objectives?
Spelling
- Finding less spelling mistakes in my work when it is returned after marking.
- Not making the same mistake twice.

Slang.
- Having fewer slang mistakes in my work.
- Reading more. (Good quality lititure)

Punctuation
- To find less mistakes in my work.
- To have a list of mistakes that I find difficult.

Write in more detail.

- to get a higher mark for my work.
- To know myself that my latest piece of work was better than the one before.

Read more
- To note how much I have read.
- To see that I have applied the knowledge from the books to my work.

Quoations
- To see quoations in my work from other sources of lititure.

Clearly Cathy was seeing the solution to many of her perceived problems in the kinds of reading she could do. In her journal, started on 3.3.95. (the day after I gave them a copy of my action plan) she wrote the following:

> *'This term I think I have learned a lot. I think that my essay work has improved but I would like to improve further. The one thing I think is the root to my improvement is my reading. I find it very hard to find the time to read as I do many other things. I need a book that I really enjoy so that I will get on and read it. Thankyou very much for suggesting 'Wives and Daughters' by Mrs. Gaskell. If you find anything else you think would be good for me to read, please could you tell me.'*

Lucy expressed similar sentiments in her action plan. Under what she could improve she wrote:

> *'My reading. I do not read enough books. When someone reccomends me a book then I will read it...'*

Under the heading, 'What can help me?' she wrote:

> *'I can improve my reading by reading books....There are books everywhere, at school, at home, and in the library.'*

And under who could help her Lucy has this to say:

> *'My mum has lots of books that are just like the ones on the list... My English teacher has already helped me by giving me a reading list and lending me 'The Mill on the Floss'. The main person who can help me is me.'*

I felt this showed good self-insight and sense of personal responsibility. I was particularly impressed with the way her action plan continued in terms of how she would know that her reading has improved:

> *'With reading I will know that I have achieved my objective when I have read more books! This will also help my spelling...'*

Cathy continued in her journal with this:

> *'I like the idea of writing down the words because it helps me to widen my vocabulary. (Even if we do have to force a cheer when you write it on the board.) Sometimes when we are told to do an essay I seem to come up with ideas or statements which nobody else has and I am not sure if it is right. I don't want to put something in that isn't right but I don't want to make a fool of myself either. Sometimes I feel a bit out of my depth but otherwise I think I am doing O.K.'*

I replied on the same day:

> *'I think you're doing MUCH better than O.K.! You have real insight*

and talent, such a keen understanding of character and motive. I like the way you analyse where you think you've got to. I wonder whether being out of your depth sometimes is such a bad thing: after all it's how we grow and change. Take risks, Cathy, with your work, your writing, your oral contributions. It's how you'll learn. I think you're doing really well.'

My response to her, quickly though it was written, was calculated. In my school journal I had already written this about her on 7.2.95.:

'Cathy has real talent. There's something about the way she answers questions in class, as if she can't believe her own insight, as if she's both proud and scared.'

I felt her own comments did nothing to contradict my impressions of her. I wanted to nurture her. I wanted to make her feel that her contributions were significant to me, to the lessons and most importantly to her own educational development. I wanted her to feel that she was in an environment from which she was safe to launch into the unknown. I felt she was about to enter another stage of development in terms of her ability to express her view of the world and her place in it.

On 10.3.95. she wrote the following in her diary:

'Ever since I can remember during school my Mum and Dad would come back from Parents Evening and say your maths is good and we are very pleased with your science but you need to improve your spelling. This was O.K. (you can't be good at everything) but nobody ever told me how to improve...So I decided that even though we were not being set I was really going to start to improve my spelling as it was the only thing (I knew of really) that was stopping me being good at English. People had said before that I had good ideas for writing. So when I found out that I was in the top set English I was really pleased. I have just finished my second essay this term and I spent a long time checking the spellings so I hope it is good enough. Cathy H.'

I was inspired by her comments. I found them deeply touching, particularly in the level of trust she was showing me. I felt that here at last I could challenge her to open up her view of English a little more. I wrote back the next day:

'I found your journal entry very moving, Cathy. As I have said before you are well placed in this group. Spelling is important (and you are improving) but please don't mistake ability in the formal aspects of the subject as the overriding ones. They have their place, and I insist that pupils pay attention to them. However, they are only the form, not the content. What we want to achieve, I hope, is a balance - a concentration on the development of your (our) ability to communicate in ways which help to clarify that communication. You really do have good ideas and sometimes your insight is better than that - it is potentially outstanding. Your Action Plan quite rightly, I think, suggests that you need to read good quality LITERATURE (note spelling!). May I say, though, that reading is really not just a means to a measurable end - at least I don't think so. I think that reading good literature enables us to find out who we are. (I give an example of the effect a book had on me at her age.)...I want you to read, Cathy, because I want you to know yourself because in knowing yourself you can find yourself a good life to lead. And if you write a few good essays along the way that help you to structure and form your ideas while you're at school (and maybe later if you decide to read English at University) then all well and good, but reading great works of Literature, should, I think, help us to lead better lives...'

Then after reading her first major essay on 'Romeo and Juliet' I appended this:

12.3.95. I have just read your essay and marked it. What an achievement! Please see me to talk about it.'

The entries so far from both Cathy and Lucy seem to me to bring some evidence for fulfilling the criteria for success on my action plan, especially when I wrote:

'pupils will voluntarily be reading 'good quality' literature; they will write about their perspectives in their journals which they will want to share with me; they will ask me questions about how they can improve their performance in English.'

Lucy's journal entries began on 28.2.95. She shows a strongly developed ability to reflect on what she is doing and the purposes of it. She also expresses enjoyment of what she is doing, another criterion by which I wish the quality of my educational work with them to be judged:

'28.2.95. My lessons with Miss Laidlaw has broaded my horison in English. I am really enjoying it. We have been doing a lot of Shakespeare which is new to me as I haven't read much before. The work is harder and more intense but the results are more pleasing and satisfying. When we hand in a piece of work or essay they are always marked by our next lesson...and this is really good.'

She continues in reflective vein:

'...Today we did a lesson plan. As far as I can see every aspect of my English can be improved but the main things I wrote down were spelling and reading. I have begun to read 'Mill on the Floss'.

There then follows two pages of analytical criticism of Tom Tulliver's character and her sense of outrage at his treatment of his sister. In my reply to this long first diary entry I wrote this (also on 28.2.95.):

'Thanks for all your comments, Lucy. What a pleasure to read....I am glad that you feel your horizons are being broadened. I would say that this was one of the main purposes of education. I agree that when you've really put a lot into something then the results are worth more. I certainly find that's the case with marking your work...It's important that it's marked well, but I also want to show you that I respect the effort you're making and that I respect you too...Now to 'Mill on the Floss'...'

e) I evaluate and modify

The issue of respect seems to me to be a fundamental one in my own enquiry about how I can improve the quality of learning with the pupils. My research (Laidlaw, 1994) has helped me to clarify the significance for learning and for well-being of showing respect for people over time. The journals also became a forum for pupils to express constructive criticism about my teaching methods. I stressed to them the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning and the necessity for them to tell me what they needed in order to improve the quality of their learning. If they did not tell me how to teach them more effectively from their point of view then I was unlikely to learn how to improve the quality of my teaching. I received the following from Lisa:

'6.3.95. I know that you have to push us as hard as you can as you get the best out of us and I think it's mostly helping, but you keep saying that we are like ...'A' level students and I think at times you forget that we are only in Year Nine and when you say don't make the same mistakes as others you can't really expect us to become perfect.'

She continues:

> *'I think that the ideas of critical friends are good but on one particular occasion you were helping C. do her essay and I needed to work on my quotes as I was already behind but because C. did not understand it you automatically thought that I would so you told me to stop my work and help C. so I was behind on mine... '*

I wrote back on 7.3.95.:

> *'Lisa, thanks for your comments. Let me take each point in turn. I think you're right about the 'A' Level bit. Of course you're Year Nine, and no less for that. I think I was trying to express admiration for how well you're doing academically, but I realise how my comments could appear to be pressurising you. I won't do it again...As to your last point you're right. I remember the incident. I am sorry that I overlooked what you need and I'll try not to do that again. I do hope, Lisa, that you feel you can talk to me about these sorts of issues. You're doing well...'*

Lucy also took an opportunity to register her displeasure at my allowing an extension to the 'Romeo and Juliet' essay at the last minute. I explained to the class that different people found the new ways of working in English perplexing and that the extra day was to enable people to improve the quality of the work that had already been completed. Lucy wrote this:

> *'9.3.95. I think we should have to hand in our essay on the day that was set. I spent a lot of my weekend writing the essay for Thursday and I know other people did too...'*

I wrote back:

> *'As to the deadline, I made a decision which in retrospect was not the right one. Not altogether. We all have to learn to meet other people's rules, and sometimes flexibility is a euphemism for indecisiveness.'*

Lucy replied:

> *'10.3.95. I understand now why you gave an extra day for our essays to be in. I see now that not everyone works at the same speed as everyone else and some people take longer to ajust to new things. I guess I acted in the heat of the moment. I realize that it was a hard decision for you to make and the decision has to meet the needs of everyone in the class and not just some of them.'*

Why I am delighted with both Lucy's and Lisa's comments is that they show a trust that I will take their comments seriously - in other words they feel safe to criticise when they see something unjust occuring. They are also taking some responsibility for what is happening in their learning by communicating to me what is hindering them. This is particularly so with Lisa. As a result of Lucy's comments I ensured that the draft-work handed in on time was marked by the next day (which gave them a weekend extra to write it up in best in time for the deadline) and those who had handed it in late had therefore less time to complete the re-drafting. In addition when I had marked their final drafts I wrote a letter to them all which, though praising them, did not, I hope, confer too much pressure on them. I felt that this was an appropriate response to the issue raised by Lisa, who clearly felt under pressure within the group.

In the letter I wanted to stress not only that they had improved in their levels (of 32 girls, 29 showed better marks this time), but what that improvement looked like. I wanted to start to help them to internalise the criteria for success built upon the good practice they were already

achieving, as well as stretching their analytical skills. In other words I wanted to demonstrate what I had already talked about in the lessons: 'aesthetic criteria' by which they could begin to judge the quality of their own work. In the back of her drafting book, Cathy has written:

> *'aesthetic - holistic, beauty/appropriateness'.*

In her action plan she has added this:

> *'I will know when I have improved because...I should feel good about my work.'*

Here is the letter I wrote to them in full:

Penn House,
Friday, 17th March.
Red Nose Day!

Dear Year Nine,

I read your essays through last night and marked them. I am so delighted with the improvements that all of you are showing in your written work that I wanted to write to you (evidence you can bring with your critical friend to substantiate claims that you are improving in the quality of your learning) to congratulate you on the efforts you are all making.

I would like you to share this letter with your parents if you want, as I am sure they will be interested to know how you're getting on. At the Parents Meeting I said that I would be making a big effort to help you improve on the formal as well as creative aspects of the subject. Your latest essays show me that you have taken our lessons seriously and that you have started to take responsibility for the ways in which you're learning best. At the beginning of the time when I started to teach you all I made a big fuss about spelling and punctuation, as well as the uses of language, expression and vocabulary. In addition we started to look at ways of enhancing your literary experience and many of you have read some difficult and challenging literature.

In your essays this time, there were comments like this:

> *'I think the reason Shakespeare includes the themes of feuding and hatred is to counterpoint it with the strong love of Romeo and Juliet;'*

Note in this extract the use of the word 'counterpoint' and how beautifully it conveys the tension between the two opposing themes: love and hate. 'Counterpoint' is a musical term, denoting growing complexity. It is particularly apposite (appropriate) in terms of the ways in which Shakespeare is creating the different threads of dramatic tension. He is like a composer, weaving themes into each other, until it is difficult to tell which theme is which. Remember the conversation we had yesterday when we talked about the ways in which Romeo is both a person, a character in his own right, and also symbolic of Shakespeare's purpose and representative of dramatic tension?

Then there's this from another writer:

> *'Goodness is not enough in the case of the Montagues and the Capulets; so instead of the encounters representing goodness, they represent fate';*

This insight is a powerful point of view, expressed from a deep understanding of the underlying meanings of the play. The writer conveys her grasp of the tensions and the intentions of both the characters and Shakespeare himself.

The next quotation from another girl goes even further in giving a point of view:

'The audience can all learn something from this play. It is not just a play, but a guide of morals. It shows how morality and law clash, and how their feud comes into it...The only way out of some situations is death. It makes us realize our own faults...;

Here, there is a self-assuredness in the views being expressed. She has drawn conclusions from the morality of the play and tried to reflect it onto a generalised meaning. This is a high-order skill and shows genuine insight and flair.

The next quotation happens to be a personal favourite. It is poetic (using a simile). The strength of the imagery is deepened by its reflection in the play itself. Shakespeare continuously reminds us of the light and dark aspects in the play by referring to light and dark imagery. This writer's insight is not only accurate but empathic.

'It appears to be an ominous situation, condemned to darkness with no distant light. However, from these circumstances came a ray of hope like a candle in the night.'

I am similarly impressed by the next writer's insight and manner of expressing it:

'The encounters are like a glass of cold water on a hot Summer's day because they are refreshing and a good side to the two families.'

I like the way the following writer has made her insights clear and the way she has used quotations to back up her arguments:

'[Juliet] becomes quite worried about her actions being too quick and too direct. You can gain a hint from this from: 'And therefore thou mayst think my behaviour light.' Again Romeo and Juliet seem the core players in their family and the main raw material for the hatred...'

Her imagery is stark and well in keeping with Shakespeare's intentions in showing us the vulnerability of two young lovers caught in the cross-fire between ignorance and blind hatred.

In the next writer's account we see how well she integrates the literature of another writer in her development of an argument:

'[The nurse] had a good heart and we gain the impression that she would be loyal to Juliet throughout. She reminds me of Nellie Dean in 'Wuthering Heights' because, like the nurse, she is torn between her loyalties...'

The following writer shows a highly-developed use of language skills as well as an understanding of the themes of the play:

'In the case of Romeo and Juliet, two lovestruck teenagers are caught in an adult world of hatred and contentious views, which drive them apart and condemn them to ... misery, causing them to take their lives.'

And finally, a few words from another girl who is beginning to write succinctly and clearly about her intentions in her work:

'The purpose of this essay is to find out why the 'starcrossed' lovers are important to the play, their meetings, love and the honour to the families. The essay will try to uncover the truth and the moral of 'Romeo and Juliet'.

I couldn't have said it better myself! I wanted to write to you because I am so impressed with what you've managed. I have only quoted a few people's comments. Believe me, I could have quoted a great many more. The insights you are beginning to articulate are most impressive.

However, (isn't there always a 'but'?!) we need to keep the standard of your work this high when you have less time to prepare for it. I also wanted to write to you as well to offer some more tips about how you can maintain such high achievement levels, as well as enjoying and hopefully seeing a value in what you're doing.

I am aware that some of you are still not checking your work through carefully enough. This is particularly annoying when I have corrected the mistakes already in your rough versions. NAUGHTY!

Keep reading good quality literature and writing in your journals. Those of you who are doing that on a regular basis seem to be gaining in confidence, and the process enables you to have a quick written feedback on anything concerning you.

Some of you expressed concern after the lesson, as well as during it, with how you can best help yourselves in the run-up to the examinations in May. In 'Hitch Hikers' Guide to the Galaxy' (not 'great' literature, but a laugh a minute!) the motto is 'DON'T PANIC!'. Best advice I can give you.

Read the set parts of the play over and over (Act One, Scene 5 + Chorus, and also Act Three, Scene Three). Ask me questions. Ask each other. Write to me about them in your journals. Start analysing them in terms of the use of language. How do you think they would be staged?

Let's keep the dialogue going. ***I WANT TO HEAR FROM ALL OF YOU!***

Cathy's comment was the one I denoted as my personal favourite in an essay for which I had awarded a Level 8 +.:

> *'It appears to be an ominous situation, condemned to darkness with no distant light. However, from these circumstances came a ray of hope like a candle in the night...'*

I find this simile particularly moving because at the beginning of our working together I noted how awkwardly sometimes that Cathy expressed herself in her writing. This image, as I noted in the letter, used Shakespeare's own preoccupation with light and dark, and in an original and poetic way gave an empathic response. I was also touched when she handed me this comment in her journal at the end of the lesson (17.3.95.) after I had given her the letter and a small illustrated book of Wordsworth's shorter poetry for her to extend her reading:

> *'17.3.95. I was really pleased with my essay. At first I was quite suprised but I did notice on my final copy that there was not one spelling or punctuation or slang mistake. The only place where I had a correction was where I had written 'his' twice. Whoops.* ***I was also pleased that you had printed an extract of my essay on the sheet you gave. I agree I did like that part of my essay very much...'*** *(my emphasis)*

She went on to say:

> *'Thankyou for the book. I have had a quick flick and now I am going to read it. Cathy H.*

At the end of the lesson she came up to me, her face wreathed in smiles, and told me about somewhere she has stayed that looked like one of the pictures in the poetry book.

March 23rd. 1995

I want to talk to you, Jack, and to the audience at AERA, about what I feel I have done. I identify with the language you are using, because in my own research (Laidlaw, 1995) I have perceived the value of identifying a common language through which we can share meanings.

Let me tell you a little about what I feel I have achieved in my work with the girls, and upon what I am basing my claim to be pleased with our progress. I am delighted with the work that the girls and I have been doing because it fulfils the criteria which I came into education to promote: I want to show my pupils that I value them as individuals; I want them to be able to master the formal aspects of English more thoroughly so that they enhance their ability to communicate clearly; I want to show them that there is a value in finding out about motive and characterisation in books and in Life; I want them to delight in their own discoveries about the Literature they are reading because in reacting to a text I believe that they learn something about their own place in the world; I want them to be able to take responsibility for the learning process and be empowered in recognising their ability to achieve success.

March 28th. 1995

Why I am also pleased with my research into my educative relationships is that I have revealed what I am learning about the process of improving my ontological authenticity within my educative relationships. By that I mean that I am true to myself as I try to bring beauty, truth and goodness into the world with the girls because that is what I believe is educational. I am also learning how to represent this process in a way which is appropriate and beautiful.

As I learn how to achieve ontological authenticity in my educational relationships I want to focus on how I think I have represented above an educational epistemology of practice. I feel that through the systematic form in which I have both facilitated and illustrated the process, i.e. the action planning process, I have revealed the values which constitute my practice and my epistemology as 'educational'.

It is also in relation to my accountability that I am contributing to an educational epistemology of practice as I justify a claim to be living my values more fully in my practice. What makes my accountability 'educational' and how does this contribute to my 'educational epistemology'? Accounting for my educational values forces me to interrogate them in such a way as to facilitate an improving knowledge of them. It also helps to create an enquiring environment from which I can better articulate my developing values in my practice. This, in itself, is an educational endeavour. My commitment to my own ontological authenticity has pushed me to greater efforts to live my values as fully as I can with my pupils and, through my educational research, to understand the educative process itself. In this process of accountability I have offered above an account of my own educational practice, as a claim to know what I am doing, The standards of judgement I use to test the validity of my claim to know my own educational practice are the values I embody and are those which constitute my practice as 'educational'.

March 30th. 1995

Moira - I am expressing this on the day on which my contract at the school has been confirmed for another term. I have been resistant to the integration of the significance of economic constraints into my educational research because of a belief that if I were to concentrate on the economic motivation for teaching, that I might dilute my vocational commitment: by doing that I might confuse educational with financial issues. I do not want McTaggart's (1993) view of 'de-moralisation' and 'de-valuation' to become overriding considerations in terms of my educational epistemology of practice. However, if my contract had indeed been terminated this term, then I would not have been in a position to continue the work with the girls in ways which I believe to be educational. It is time for me to recognise the dialectic between economic forces and educational aspirations. I am now embracing the realities of the economic forces which influence the professional lives of all teachers in the country.

Jack - You mentioned earlier today that you had found it 'horrendously difficult to control your emotions' during the last couple of weeks of not knowing whether you could be employed to continue teaching your pupils. I've noticed your determination not to permit the forces of economic rationalism to de-value or de-moralise your vocational commitment. But you rarely show in your writing the nature of this struggle. Why is this?

Moira - I've partly answered this above. I have a belief that it is better to dwell on the positive. That education is an expression of an optimistic ontology. I'm beginning to understand intellectually that by denying the influence on my practice of social, economic and political relations, the issue of authenticity is becoming problematic.

Jack - Why is it becoming problematic?

Moira - I am begining to understand that I can no longer leave it out of the picture if I am trying to account for how I bring my values more fully into my practice as an educator. These relations have influenced my interactions with my pupils and I can no longer ignore them. I have had to very quickly assimilate the social, political and economic reality into my classroom as I prepared them for my imminent departure. Up to this point I have concentrated on the educational influence of my love for them and my love of literature in their learning.

April 4th. 1995.

Moira - Last night I marked an essay I had set the class, which was to analyse the fourteen lines of the Chorus at the end of Act One and to show the relevance of the lines to the play as a whole. In Rhea's essay I find an encapsulation of all the qualities I have tried to promote in my teaching of 'Romeo and Juliet':

In the past I could never see the attraction people have for Shakespeare. His works to me were like a strange and ancient language and indeed in some ways it still is. I really was quite terrified at the thought that I would one day have to study a Shakespeare play for an examination. All I can now say is, how wrong I was! Not just Shakespeare's wonderful way with words, his clever sonnets and tragic scenarios, but the way he gives you so many clues as to what is going to happen later on in the play. There are so many morals being shown through the characters and the melancholy atmosphere of Verona, that it affects me greatly, and I am beginning to see what Miss Laidlaw means when she says, in all her grace and wonder, that 'great Literature should help us to lead better lives'.

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